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# CHICAGO SINCE 1837

*by*

GORDON BEST

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Chicago in 1865

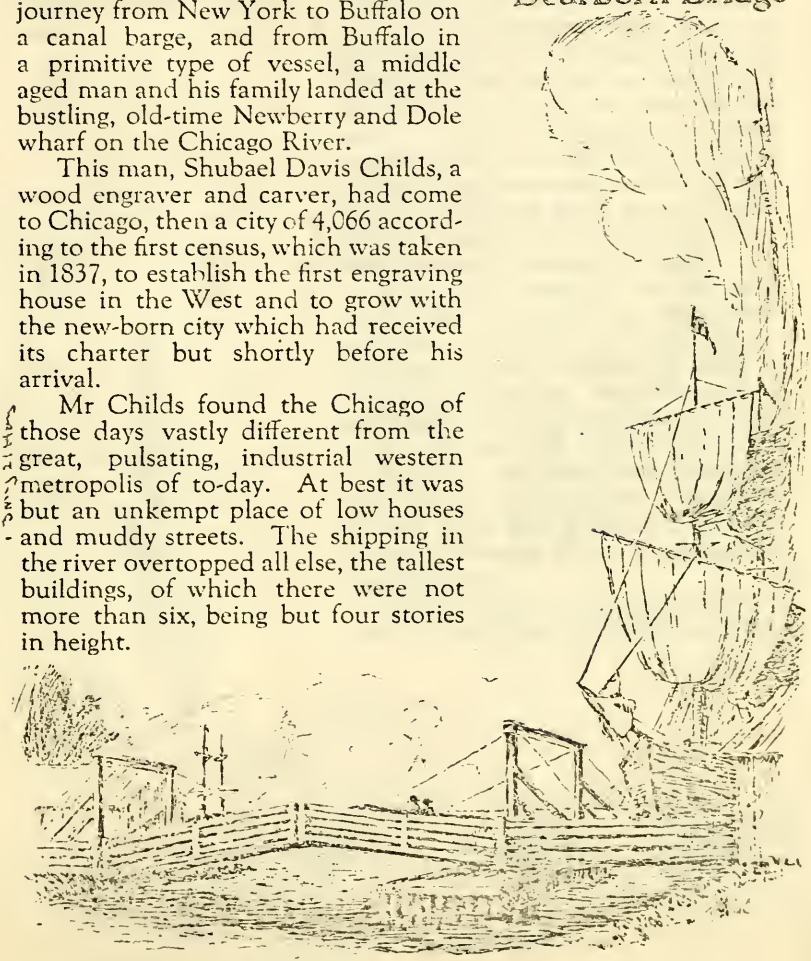
# CHICAGO SINCE 1837.

ONE bright day in the early spring of 1837, after a slow and tiresome journey from New York to Buffalo on a canal barge, and from Buffalo in a primitive type of vessel, a middle aged man and his family landed at the bustling, old-time Newberry and Dole wharf on the Chicago River.

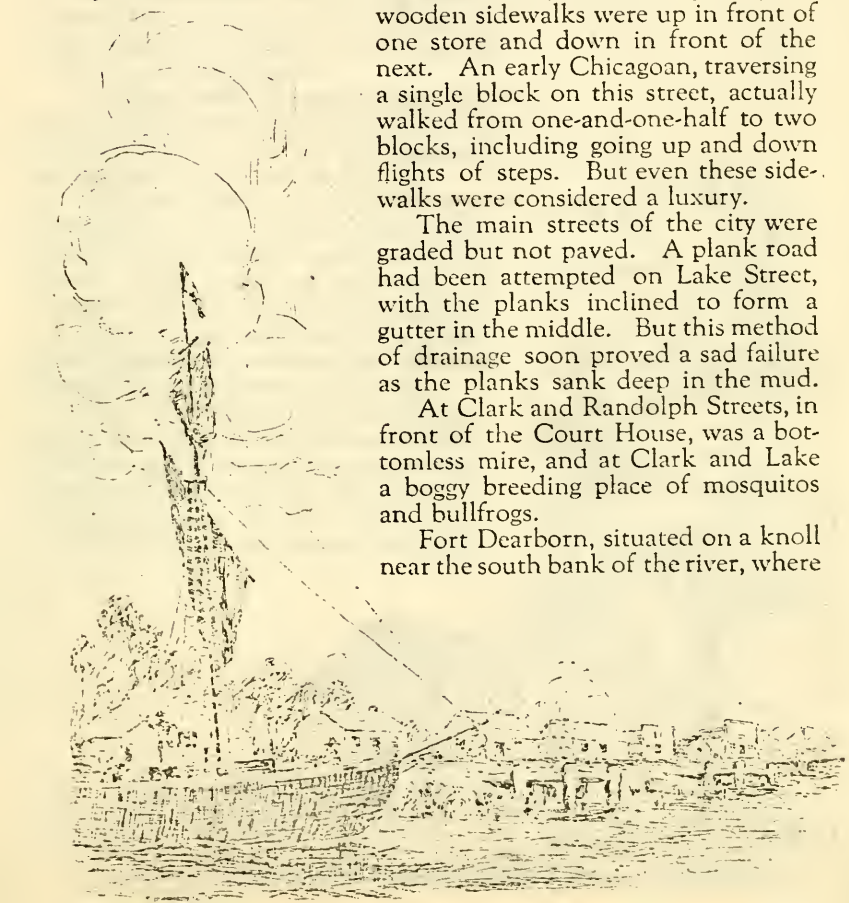
This man, Shubael Davis Childs, a wood engraver and carver, had come to Chicago, then a city of 4,066 according to the first census, which was taken in 1837, to establish the first engraving house in the West and to grow with the new-born city which had received its charter but shortly before his arrival.

Mr Childs found the Chicago of those days vastly different from the great, pulsating, industrial western metropolis of to-day. At best it was but an unkempt place of low houses and muddy streets. The shipping in the river overtopped all else, the tallest buildings, of which there were not more than six, being but four stories in height.

Dearborn Bridge



## South Water Street



South Water Street was the centre of business activities, with its shambling row of frame and brick stores set back from the river about one hundred feet. Each store had its wharf frontage on the river. Scarcely any two neighboring ones were on the same level, and consequently the wooden sidewalks were up in front of one store and down in front of the next. An early Chicagoan, traversing a single block on this street, actually walked from one-and-one-half to two blocks, including going up and down flights of steps. But even these sidewalks were considered a luxury.

The main streets of the city were graded but not paved. A plank road had been attempted on Lake Street, with the planks inclined to form a gutter in the middle. But this method of drainage soon proved a sad failure as the planks sank deep in the mud.

At Clark and Randolph Streets, in front of the Court House, was a bottomless mire, and at Clark and Lake a boggy breeding place of mosquitos and bullfrogs.

Fort Dearborn, situated on a knoll near the south bank of the river, where

Michigan Avenue now is, presented a trim appearance with its white-washed walls and well-kept garden.

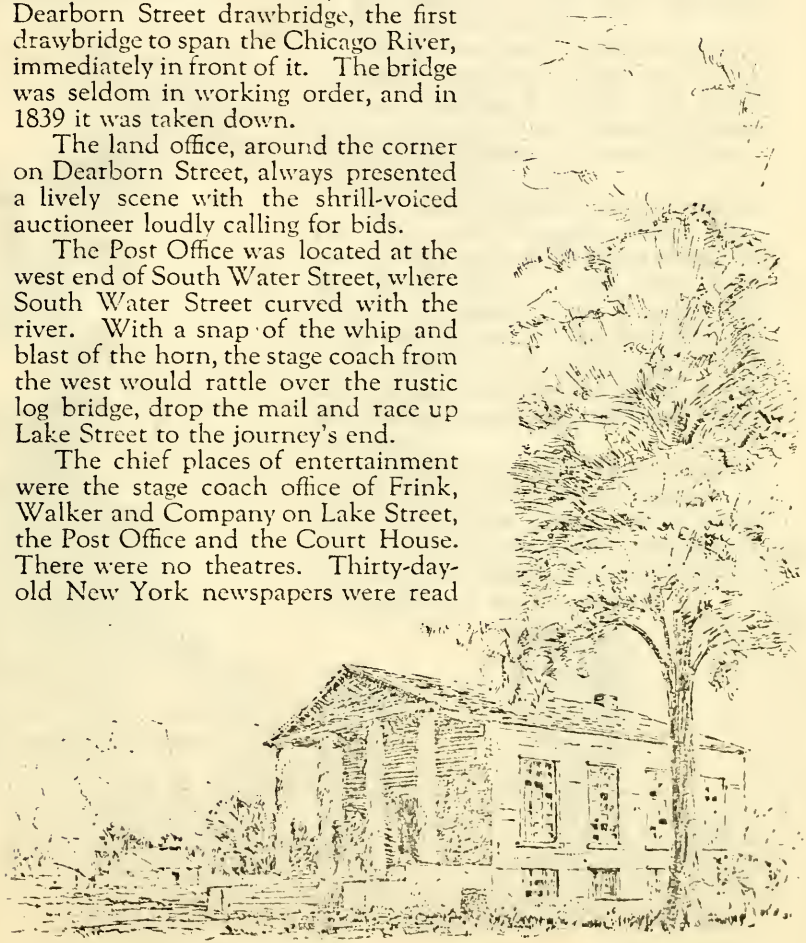
Newberry and Dole's store stood at the southeast corner of Dearborn and South Water Streets, with the Dearborn Street drawbridge, the first drawbridge to span the Chicago River, immediately in front of it. The bridge was seldom in working order, and in 1839 it was taken down.

The land office, around the corner on Dearborn Street, always presented a lively scene with the shrill-voiced auctioneer loudly calling for bids.

The Post Office was located at the west end of South Water Street, where South Water Street curved with the river. With a snap of the whip and blast of the horn, the stage coach from the west would rattle over the rustic log bridge, drop the mail and race up Lake Street to the journey's end.

The chief places of entertainment were the stage coach office of Frink, Walker and Company on Lake Street, the Post Office and the Court House. There were no theatres. Thirty-day-old New York newspapers were read

First Court House



aloud in the quaint stores, where crowds of men were usually assembled.

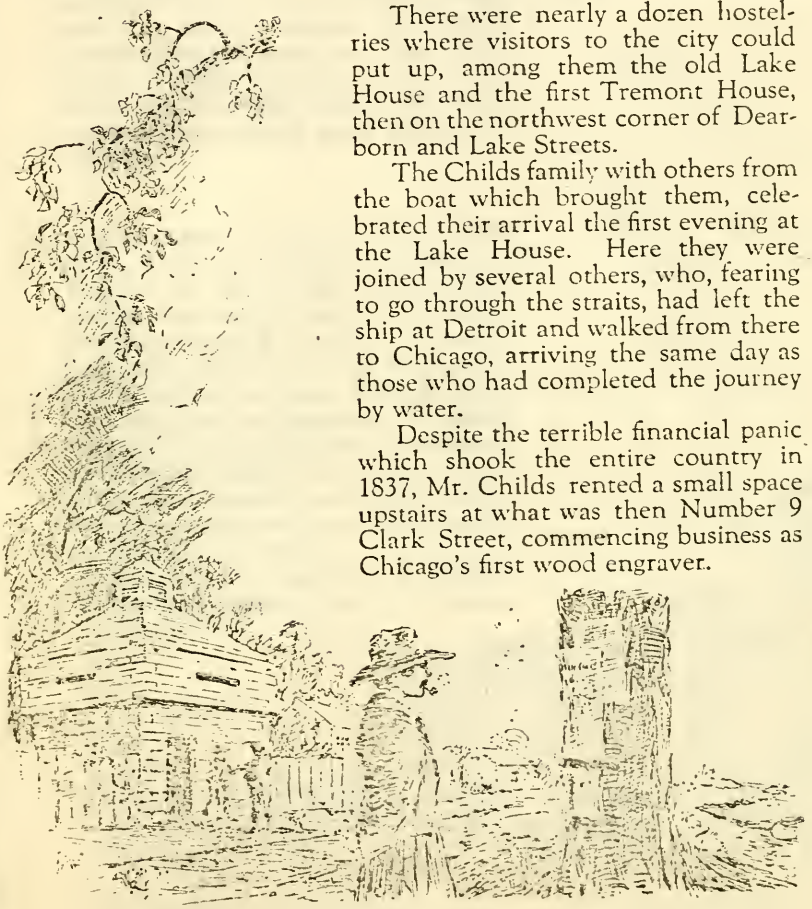
At night the Childs family was often awakened by the dismal howling of wolves within the city limits, and in the daytime cattle and pigs ran loose about the streets.

There were nearly a dozen hostelries where visitors to the city could put up, among them the old Lake House and the first Tremont House, then on the northwest corner of Dearborn and Lake Streets.

The Childs family with others from the boat which brought them, celebrated their arrival the first evening at the Lake House. Here they were joined by several others, who, fearing to go through the straits, had left the ship at Detroit and walked from there to Chicago, arriving the same day as those who had completed the journey by water.

Despite the terrible financial panic which shook the entire country in 1837, Mr. Childs rented a small space upstairs at what was then Number 9 Clark Street, commencing business as Chicago's first wood engraver.

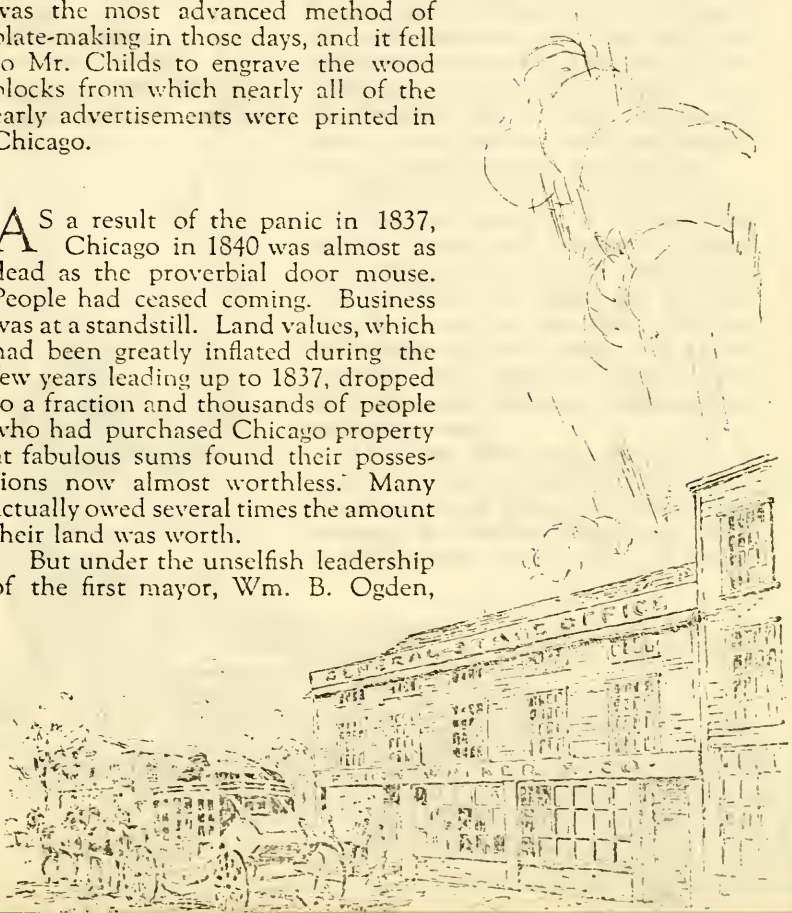
Fort Dearborn



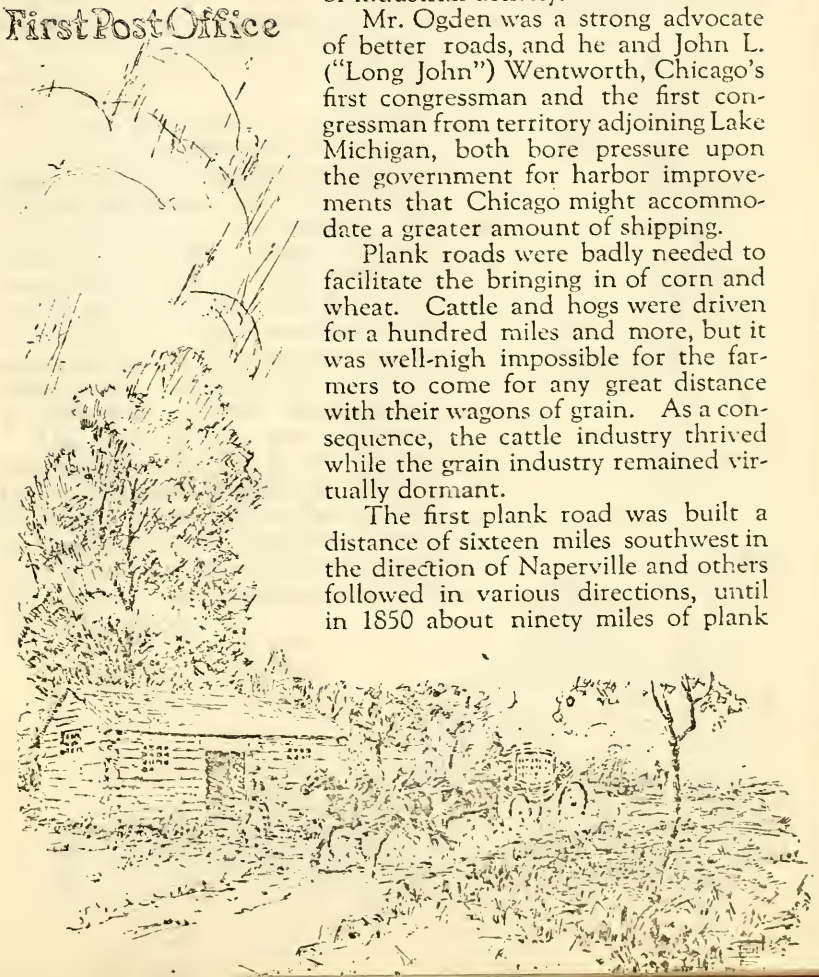
In 1838 the first theatre opened in a two-story frame building. It was called the Rialto. Mr. Childs cut the advertisements for this theatre from large blocks of wood and from these wood blocks, or "wood cuts", the advertising signs were printed. This was the most advanced method of plate-making in those days, and it fell to Mr. Childs to engrave the wood blocks from which nearly all of the early advertisements were printed in Chicago.

AS a result of the panic in 1837, Chicago in 1840 was almost as dead as the proverbial door mouse. People had ceased coming. Business was at a standstill. Land values, which had been greatly inflated during the few years leading up to 1837, dropped to a fraction and thousands of people who had purchased Chicago property at fabulous sums found their possessions now almost worthless. Many actually owed several times the amount their land was worth.

But under the unselfish leadership of the first mayor, Wm. B. Ogden,



who, like the rest, had suffered heavily in the crisis, Chicago was soon to throw off its bondages and become once more a growing, thriving centre of industrial activity.




Mr. Ogden was a strong advocate of better roads, and he and John L. ("Long John") Wentworth, Chicago's first congressman and the first congressman from territory adjoining Lake Michigan, both bore pressure upon the government for harbor improvements that Chicago might accommodate a greater amount of shipping.

Plank roads were badly needed to facilitate the bringing in of corn and wheat. Cattle and hogs were driven for a hundred miles and more, but it was well-nigh impossible for the farmers to come for any great distance with their wagons of grain. As a consequence, the cattle industry thrived while the grain industry remained virtually dormant.

The first plank road was built a distance of sixteen miles southwest in the direction of Naperville and others followed in various directions, until in 1850 about ninety miles of plank

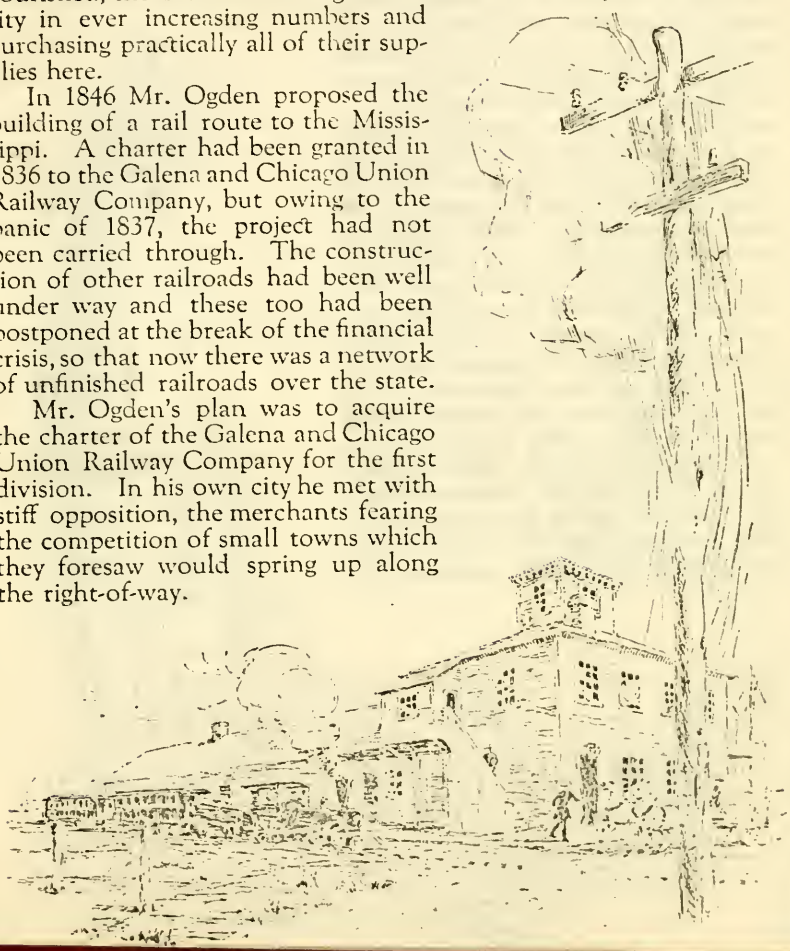
roads ran out of Chicago. This tended to greatly increase cultivation of the soil, for the farmers now had a ready market that was easily accessible.

Quite naturally, retail business flourished, the farmers coming to the city in ever increasing numbers and purchasing practically all of their supplies here.

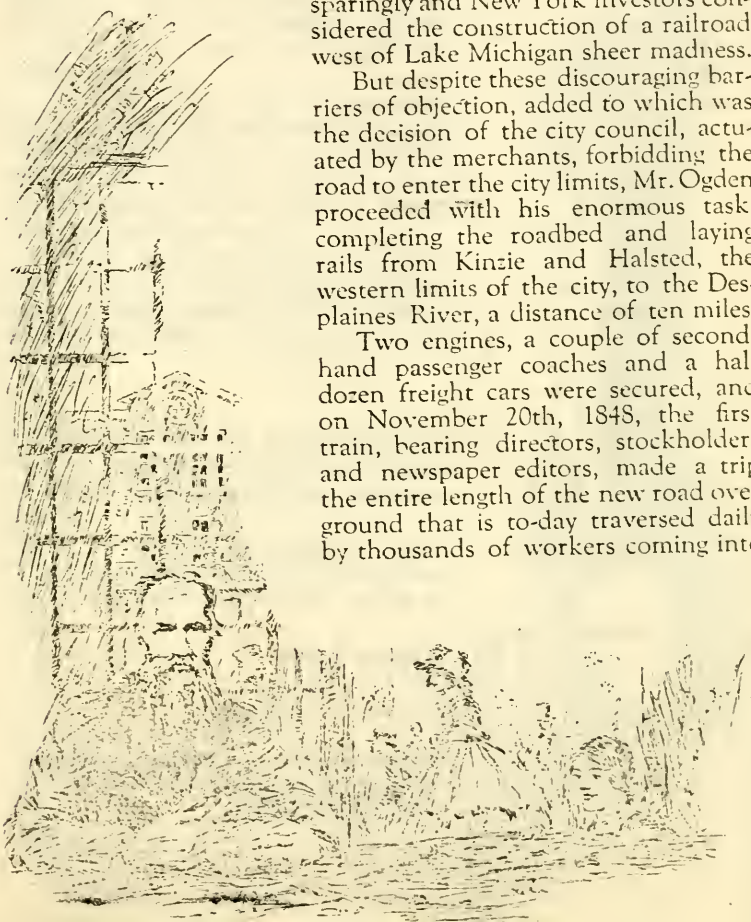
In 1846 Mr. Ogden proposed the building of a rail route to the Mississippi. A charter had been granted in 1836 to the Galena and Chicago Union Railway Company, but owing to the panic of 1837, the project had not been carried through. The construction of other railroads had been well under way and these too had been postponed at the break of the financial crisis, so that now there was a network of unfinished railroads over the state.

Mr. Ogden's plan was to acquire the charter of the Galena and Chicago Union Railway Company for the first division. In his own city he met with stiff opposition, the merchants fearing the competition of small towns which they foresaw would spring up along the right-of-way.

Old Galena Depot



S.D. Childs I. at work



The farmers, on the other hand, lent their hearty support, subscribing liberally for stock in response to Mr. Ogden's appeals made all along the line in the form of speeches and personal solicitation. Chicagoans invested sparingly and New York investors considered the construction of a railroad west of Lake Michigan sheer madness.

But despite these discouraging barriers of objection, added to which was the decision of the city council, actuated by the merchants, forbidding the road to enter the city limits, Mr. Ogden proceeded with his enormous task, completing the roadbed and laying rails from Kinzie and Halsted, the western limits of the city, to the Desplaines River, a distance of ten miles.

Two engines, a couple of second-hand passenger coaches and a half dozen freight cars were secured, and on November 20th, 1848, the first train, bearing directors, stockholders and newspaper editors, made a trip the entire length of the new road over ground that is to-day traversed daily by thousands of workers coming into

the city to their business and going home again at night.

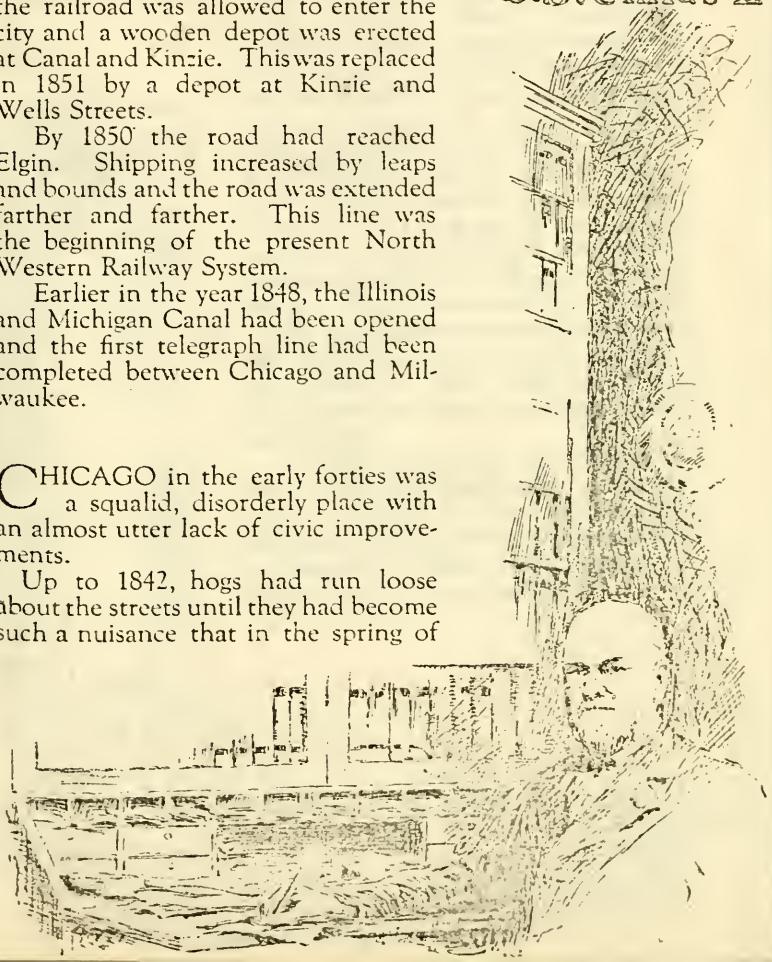
At first the passengers boarded and left the trains on the open prairie at Halsted and Kinzie Streets, but in 1849 the railroad was allowed to enter the city and a wooden depot was erected at Canal and Kinzie. This was replaced in 1851 by a depot at Kinzie and Wells Streets.

By 1850 the road had reached Elgin. Shipping increased by leaps and bounds and the road was extended farther and farther. This line was the beginning of the present North Western Railway System.

Earlier in the year 1848, the Illinois and Michigan Canal had been opened and the first telegraph line had been completed between Chicago and Milwaukee.

CHICAGO in the early forties was a squalid, disorderly place with an almost utter lack of civic improvements.

Up to 1842, hogs had run loose about the streets until they had become such a nuisance that in the spring of

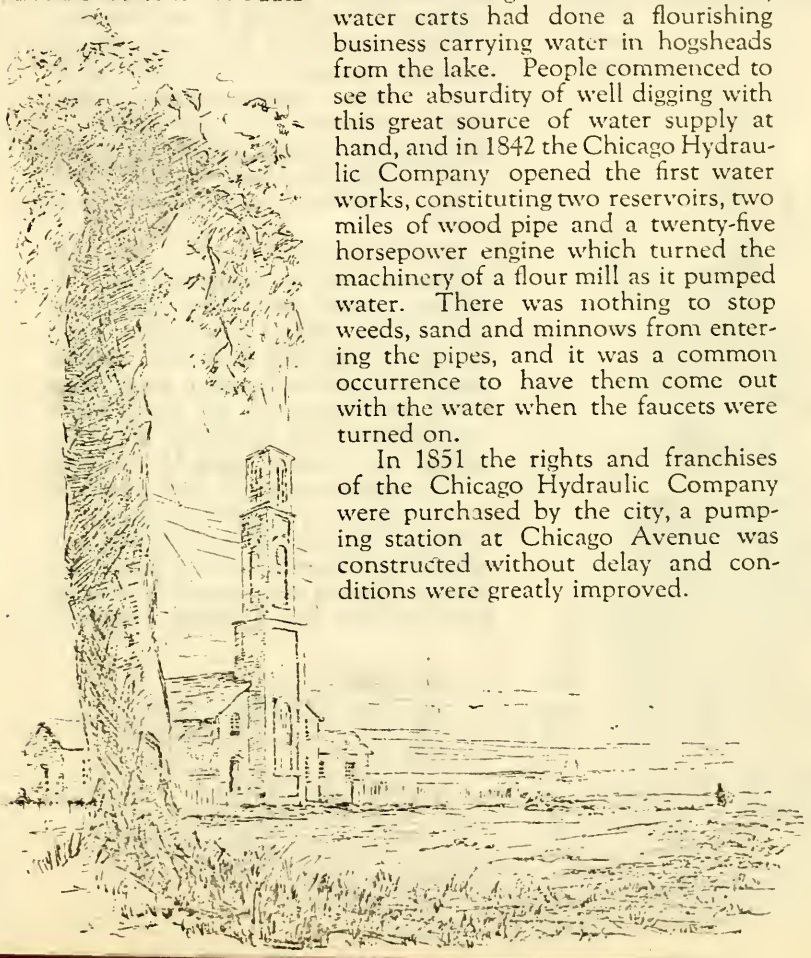


1842 an ordinance was put through making it unlawful for them to be upon the public thoroughfares.

Early settlers had dug their own wells, but during the boom days when there were a large number of transients, water carts had done a flourishing business carrying water in hogsheads from the lake. People commenced to see the absurdity of well digging with this great source of water supply at hand, and in 1842 the Chicago Hydraulic Company opened the first water works, constituting two reservoirs, two miles of wood pipe and a twenty-five horsepower engine which turned the machinery of a flour mill as it pumped water. There was nothing to stop weeds, sand and minnows from entering the pipes, and it was a common occurrence to have them come out with the water when the faucets were turned on.

In 1851 the rights and franchises of the Chicago Hydraulic Company were purchased by the city, a pumping station at Chicago Avenue was constructed without delay and conditions were greatly improved.

First Water Works



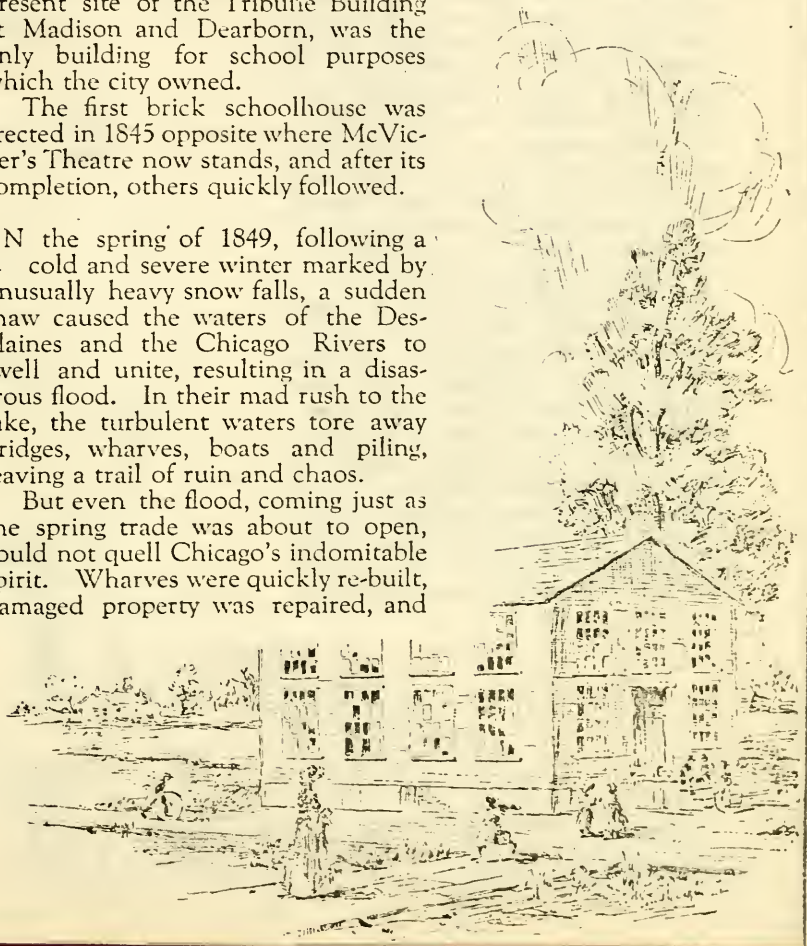
Up to 1845 no school buildings had been erected. Children were taught in churches, homes and in the barracks of the fort after its evacuation. A frame cottage, known as the Rumsey School, that stood on the present site of the Tribune Building at Madison and Dearborn, was the only building for school purposes which the city owned.

The first brick schoolhouse was erected in 1845 opposite where McVicker's Theatre now stands, and after its completion, others quickly followed.

IN the spring of 1849, following a cold and severe winter marked by unusually heavy snow falls, a sudden thaw caused the waters of the Desplaines and the Chicago Rivers to swell and unite, resulting in a disastrous flood. In their mad rush to the lake, the turbulent waters tore away bridges, wharves, boats and piling, leaving a trail of ruin and chaos.

But even the flood, coming just as the spring trade was about to open, could not quell Chicago's indomitable spirit. Wharves were quickly re-built, damaged property was repaired, and

Rumsey Schoolhouse

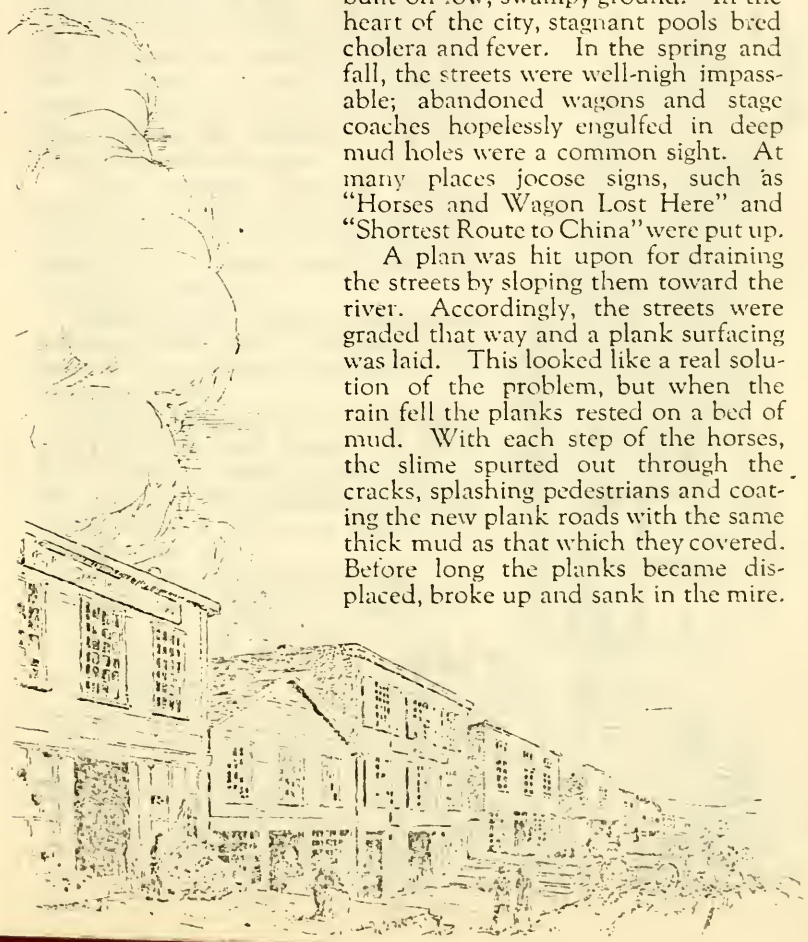


new bridges of the centre-pier, pivot type replaced the ones that had been washed away.

From the first, the drainage problem was a serious one. Chicago was built on low, swampy ground. In the heart of the city, stagnant pools bred cholera and fever. In the spring and fall, the streets were well-nigh impassable; abandoned wagons and stage coaches hopelessly engulfed in deep mud holes were a common sight. At many places jocose signs, such as "Horses and Wagon Lost Here" and "Shortest Route to China" were put up.

A plan was hit upon for draining the streets by sloping them toward the river. Accordingly, the streets were graded that way and a plank surfacing was laid. This looked like a real solution of the problem, but when the rain fell the planks rested on a bed of mud. With each step of the horses, the slime spurted out through the cracks, splashing pedestrians and coating the new plank roads with the same thick mud as that which they covered. Before long the planks became displaced, broke up and sank in the mire.

Clark Street in 1857



And then Chicago awoke to the fact that in order to have a dry and healthful city, the level must be raised high enough to permit of proper drainage. So it was decided to elevate the city from a two-foot to a fourteen-foot level above the water, making a total of twelve feet to be filled in. Earth for this purpose was obtained from the bed of the river and from excavations, and soon the streets began to rise around the buildings and first floors became basements.

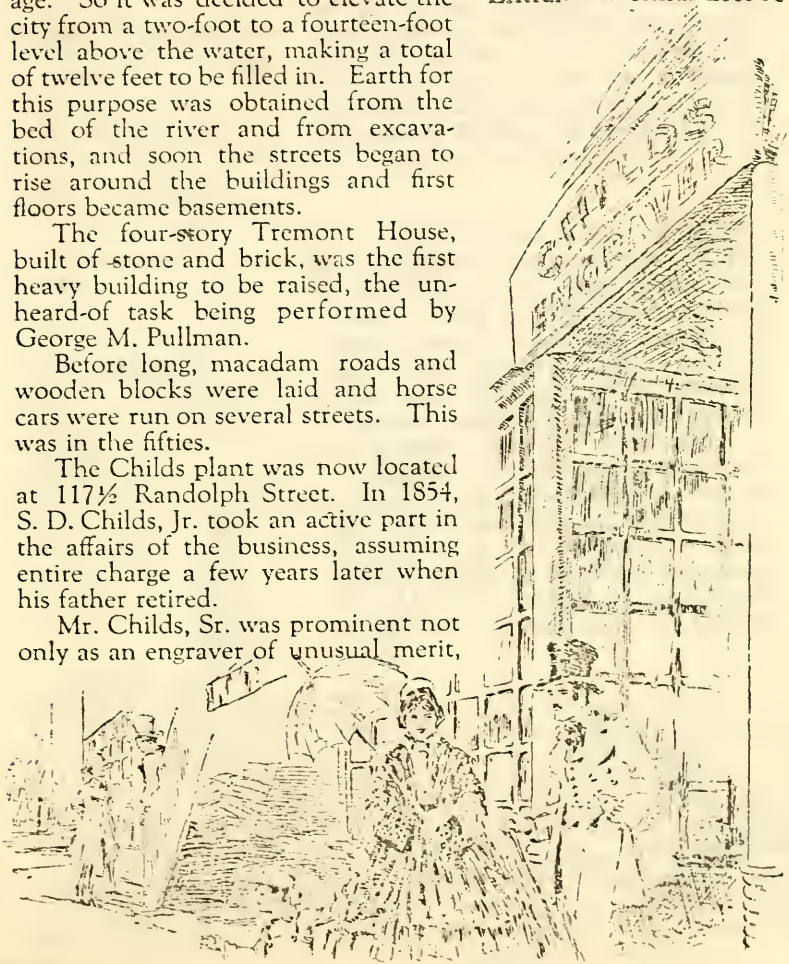
The four-story Tremont House, built of stone and brick, was the first heavy building to be raised, the unheard-of task being performed by George M. Pullman.

Before long, macadam roads and wooden blocks were laid and horse cars were run on several streets. This was in the fifties.

The Childs plant was now located at 117½ Randolph Street. In 1854, S. D. Childs, Jr. took an active part in the affairs of the business, assuming entire charge a few years later when his father retired.

Mr. Childs, Sr. was prominent not only as an engraver of unusual merit,

Entrance to Childs in 1865



but also as a public-spirited citizen, taking a leading part in the affairs of his day. He was a strong advocate of a better water supply, improved sewerage conditions, naming of streets, efficient lighting, and many other projects of public welfare. In the days leading up to the Civil War, he was a wholehearted abolitionist, bitterly opposing slavery and fighting untiringly for the principles in which he believed.

Public Square in 1865

IN 1860, Chicago was a scrawny, disheveled young city of 109,000, in the midst of its reconstruction and growth. Half of the city had been raised to the fourteen-foot level, with many of the aerial structures perched upon lanky skeletons of framework, while the other half still wallowed in the primeval mud of old Chicago.

Despite its undressed appearance, Chicago, afire with ambition, invited the Republican National Convention. And here, in The Wigwam, a huge, wooden building of flimsy construction, Abraham Lincoln was nominated in 1860 for President of the United States.

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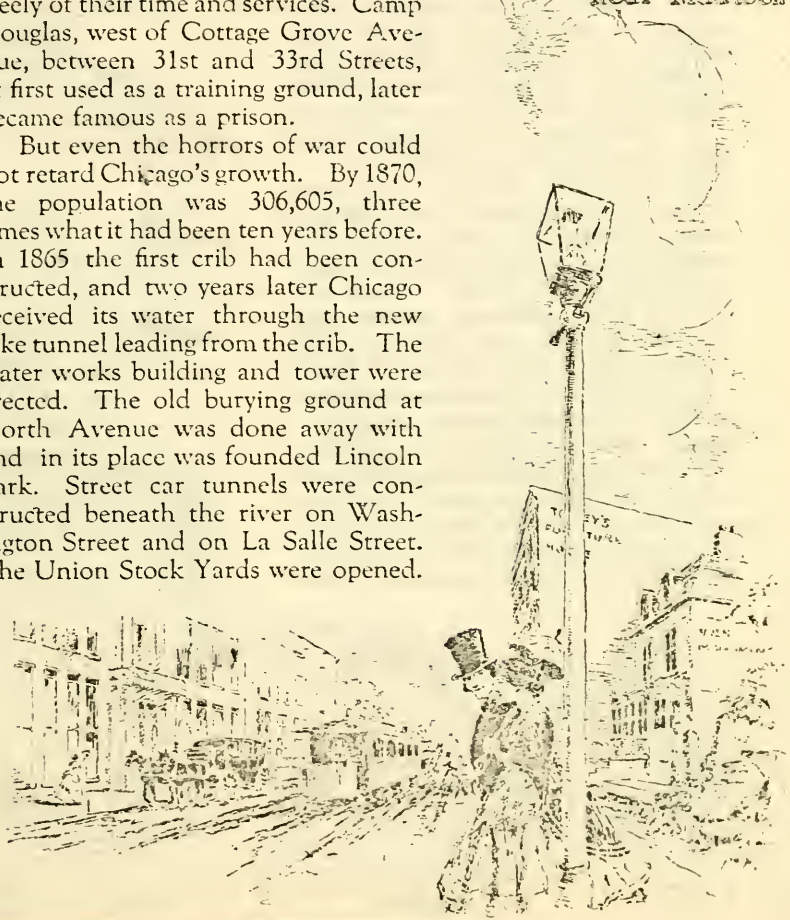
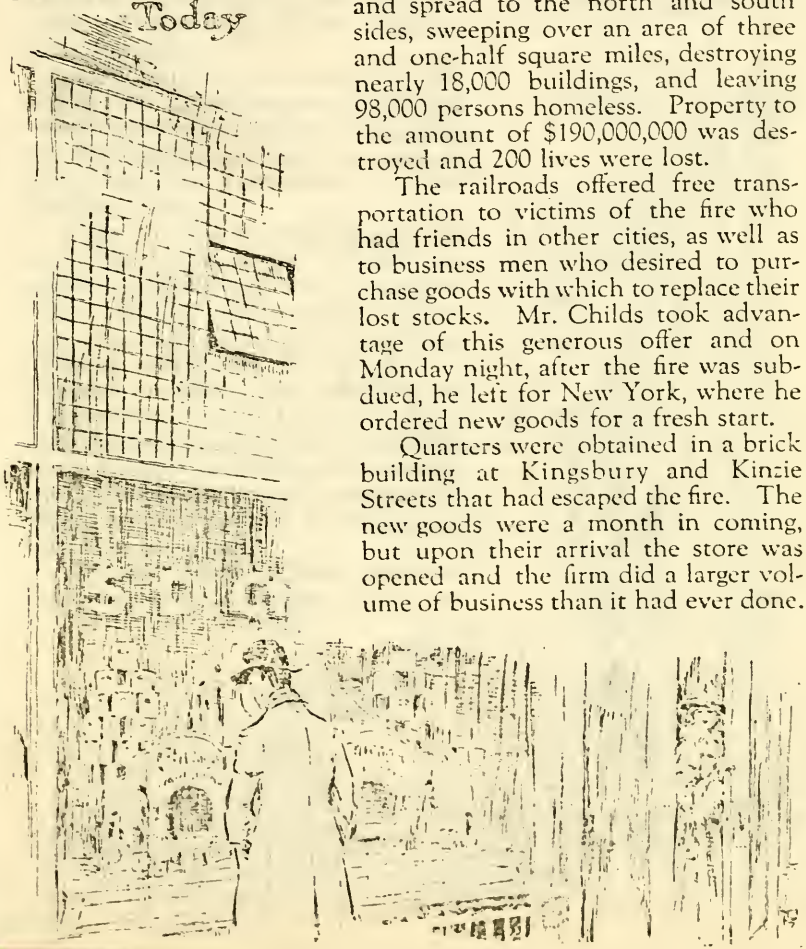
During the dark days of the Civil War, Chicago contributed liberally of men, money and sympathies. Women knitted, sewed, tore bandages and performed many other useful tasks, while prominent business men gave freely of their time and services. Camp Douglas, west of Cottage Grove Avenue, between 31st and 33rd Streets, at first used as a training ground, later became famous as a prison.

But even the horrors of war could not retard Chicago's growth. By 1870, the population was 306,605, three times what it had been ten years before. In 1865 the first crib had been constructed, and two years later Chicago received its water through the new lake tunnel leading from the crib. The water works building and tower were erected. The old burying ground at North Avenue was done away with and in its place was founded Lincoln Park. Street car tunnels were constructed beneath the river on Washington Street and on La Salle Street. The Union Stock Yards were opened.



Early Scene at State near Madison

Childs Store of Today



But Chicago was soon to witness its greatest disaster. In the fall of 1871, after a hot summer and a long dry spell, came the terrible fire which wiped out the entire business section and spread to the north and south sides, sweeping over an area of three and one-half square miles, destroying nearly 18,000 buildings, and leaving 98,000 persons homeless. Property to the amount of $190,000,000 was destroyed and 200 lives were lost.

The railroads offered free transportation to victims of the fire who had friends in other cities, as well as to business men who desired to purchase goods with which to replace their lost stocks. Mr. Childs took advantage of this generous offer and on Monday night, after the fire was subdued, he left for New York, where he ordered new goods for a fresh start.

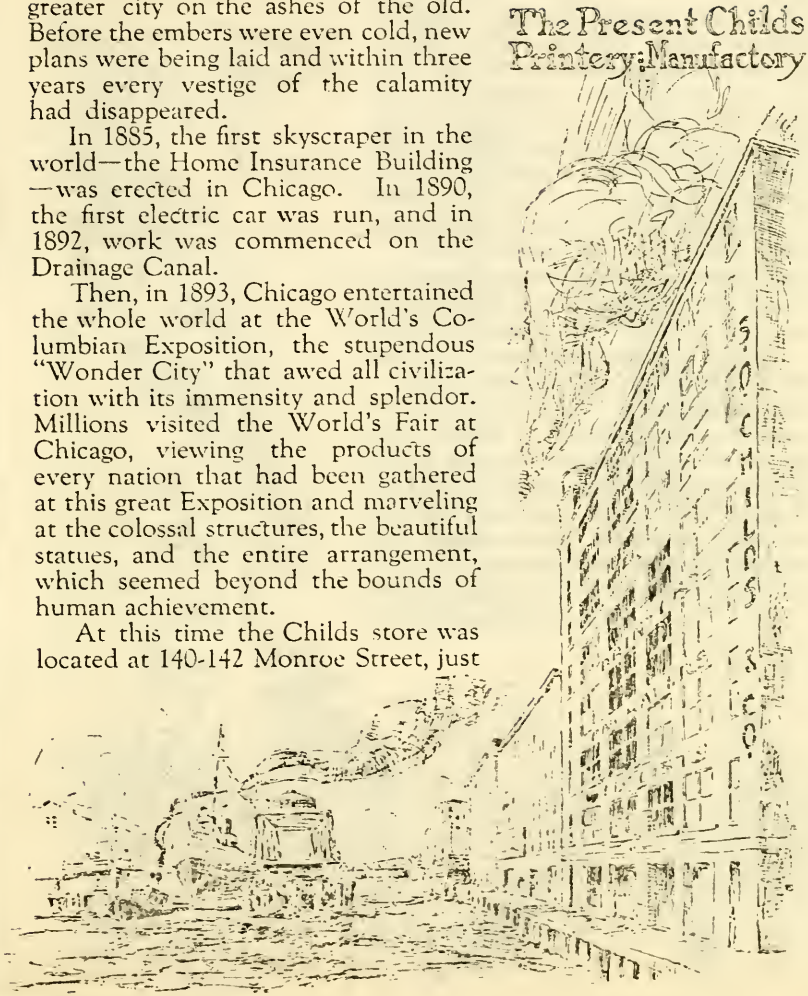
Quarters were obtained in a brick building at Kingsbury and Kinzie Streets that had escaped the fire. The new goods were a month in coming, but upon their arrival the store was opened and the firm did a larger volume of business than it had ever done.

CHICAGO, undaunted by the appalling disaster, set itself nobly to the task of building a new and greater city on the ashes of the old. Before the embers were even cold, new plans were being laid and within three years every vestige of the calamity had disappeared.

In 1885, the first skyscraper in the world—the Home Insurance Building—was erected in Chicago. In 1890, the first electric car was run, and in 1892, work was commenced on the Drainage Canal.

Then, in 1893, Chicago entertained the whole world at the World's Columbian Exposition, the stupendous "Wonder City" that awed all civilization with its immensity and splendor. Millions visited the World's Fair at Chicago, viewing the products of every nation that had been gathered at this great Exposition and marveling at the colossal structures, the beautiful statues, and the entire arrangement, which seemed beyond the bounds of human achievement.

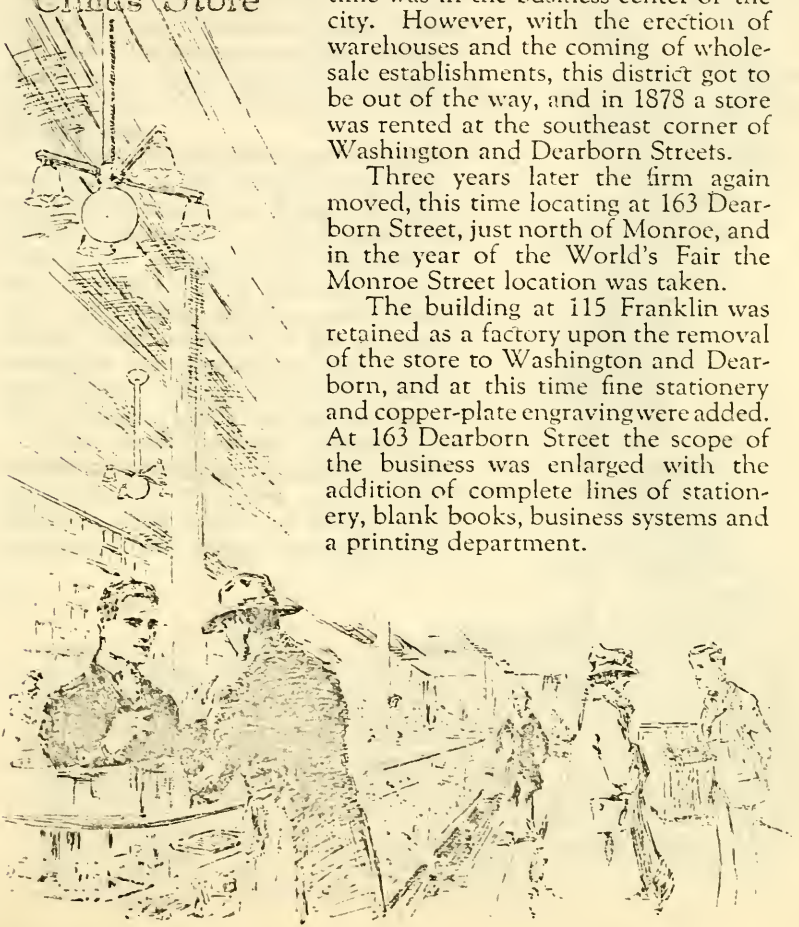
At this time the Childs store was located at 140-142 Monroe Street, just



west of Clark. Two years after the fire, a four-story brick building had been completed at 115 South Franklin Street, and the quarters had been changed from Kingsbury and Kinzie to the new location, which at that time was in the business center of the city. However, with the erection of warehouses and the coming of wholesale establishments, this district got to be out of the way, and in 1878 a store was rented at the southeast corner of Washington and Dearborn Streets.

Three years later the firm again moved, this time locating at 163 Dearborn Street, just north of Monroe, and in the year of the World's Fair the Monroe Street location was taken.

The building at 115 Franklin was retained as a factory upon the removal of the store to Washington and Dearborn, and at this time fine stationery and copper-plate engraving were added. At 163 Dearborn Street the scope of the business was enlarged with the addition of complete lines of stationery, blank books, business systems and a printing department.



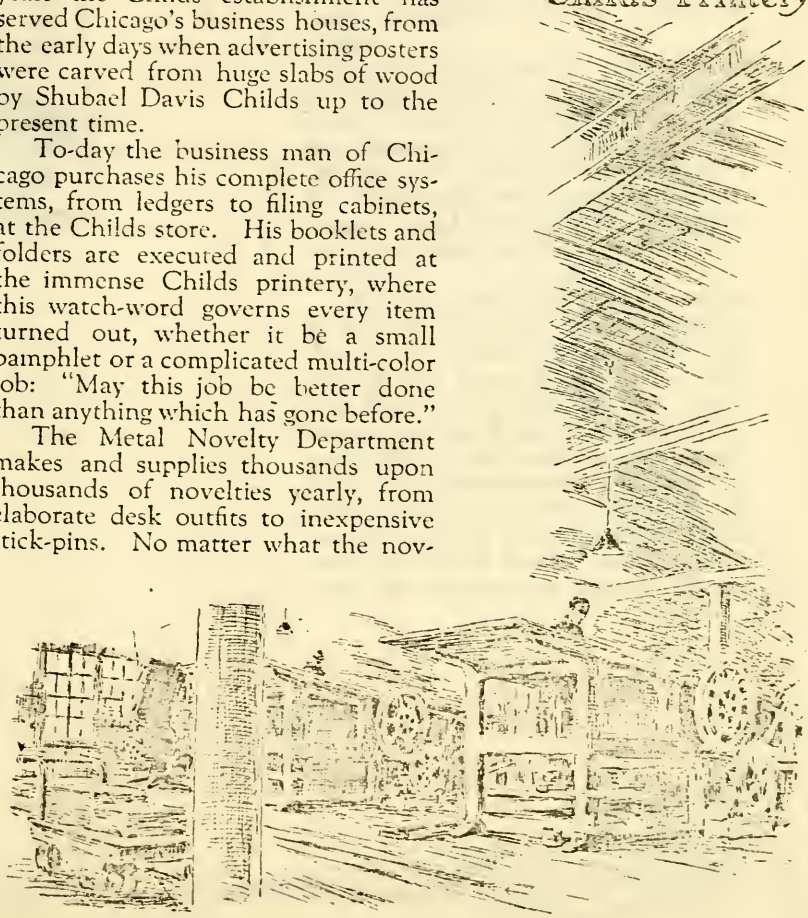
Interior of Present Childs Store

From its inception, the house of Childs has maintained a steady growth, consistent with the wondrous growth of the great city with which it has been so closely identified from the date of Chicago's birth. For eighty years the Childs establishment has served Chicago's business houses, from the early days when advertising posters were carved from huge slabs of wood by Shubael Davis Childs up to the present time.

To-day the business man of Chicago purchases his complete office systems, from ledgers to filing cabinets, at the Childs store. His booklets and folders are executed and printed at the immense Childs printery, where this watch-word governs every item turned out, whether it be a small pamphlet or a complicated multi-color job: "May this job be better done than anything which has gone before."

The Metal Novelty Department makes and supplies thousands upon thousands of novelties yearly, from elaborate desk outfits to inexpensive stick-pins. No matter what the nov-

A Corner of the Childs Printery



elty or how intricate the design, S. D. Childs & Company will handle it with the utmost precision and accuracy—and with a particular regard for their promise of delivery—a feature of Childs service which distinguishes every department of the House of Childs.

Childs engraving, for either social or business use, is the acme of good taste. Chicago's leading business houses entrust their letterhead and other engraving to Childs' scrupulous care. And likewise Childs handles the fastidious social engraving for Chicago's most particular individuals, clubs and societies.

An invitation is cordially extended to visit the House of Childs in all its departments — the retail stationery store at 136 South Clark Street, with the engraving plant on the upper floors; and the huge, modernly-equipped printery and metal novelty manufactory in the eight-story building just east of the new Monroe Street Bridge, extending from the river to the north west corner of Market and Monroe, with the entrance on Monroe Street.

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